



## Legal Counsel for Youth and Children: Impact Report

December 12, 2014

LCYC is committed to providing holistic legal services to children in the child welfare system. Our advocacy makes a difference. Over the past year, LCYC has been reviewing placement and case resolution on all of our cases. We found a correlation between when an LCYC attorney is appointed to advocate for the child and the child's likelihood of residing with family and remaining or returning home.

As background, within 72 hours of removing a child from his or her family, the State is required to go before the court, so that the parents may be heard. With the assistance and advice of attorneys, the parents may agree to removal or have a contested hearing. In contrast, the vast majority of children in Washington have no legal advocate at this initial court hearing, and thus their voices are not heard.

The initial court hearing has a tremendous impact on the family and resolution of the case going forward. At the initial hearing children may be removed from their homes – potentially forever. Decisions made by the court at the initial hearing may result in the separation of siblings, limited visitation with parents or other family, and disruptions in school. Despite the enormous impact of the initial hearing upon each child, Washington refuses to join the majority of U.S. states in ensuring that an attorney is present to protect the unique legal rights of the child – rights such as safety, family contact, and permanency.

A review of our data shows that, if a child has access to an LCYC attorney from the initial court hearing going forward – rather than the attorney joining the case at a later time – the child is;

- more likely to remain or return home
- more likely to reside with a parent, relative, or other known suitable adult rather than in foster care with strangers
- more likely to leave the system due to a successful return home or permanency with relatives

Additionally, 22% of children who received the benefit of an LCYC attorney starting at the initial hearing had their cases dismissed prior to the court entering an order of dependency. This means that these children remained or returned home with limited disruption or court involvement

We will continue to monitor placements in ongoing cases and outcomes of resolved cases relative to when an LCYC attorney becomes the child's advocate. Our newly designed Access Database will allow us to track and learn from a variety of other case data in the future, helping us to continually review and improve services for children and families.

We hope you will support LCYC in our efforts to empower children and families. You can learn more about our organization, services, and how you can help by visiting us online at [www.lcycwa.com](http://www.lcycwa.com). Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Erin L. Lovell".

Erin L. Lovell  
Legal Counsel for Youth and Children  
Executive Director